

Chinese Creation Myth and Vocabulary

Section Objective:

- Monitor reading comprehension
- Evaluate an author's argument
- Identify cause and effect
- Understand the way a work of literature is related to its historical period
- Analyze characteristics of folktales
- Analyze similes
- Understand synonyms and epithets
- Understand idioms

“Chinese Creation Myth”

Introduction to the Story

Today's reading concerns two distinct folktales related to the same character, Pan Gu. Frequently in oral traditions, stories about the same character evolve differently because they come from different parts of a country or from different ethnic subgroups within a broader cultural tradition. Such is the case with the Pan Gu stories.

Pan Gu is usually depicted as a hairy giant with horns on his head and clothed in furs.

Reading Skills

Although we do not have a specific time period for the first story, it reflects elements common to works describing the origin of the world. The name for such stories is cosmology, coming from two Greek words *cosmos* (*world*) and *logos* (*study of*).

As you monitor your reading, examine a common **theme in creation myths**, the need to *create order out of chaos*. Some person, some god, or some force enters the chaos and begins creating some pattern that we recognize as the world. Sometimes the effects occur instantly, sometimes over long periods of time. **List the series of events** that lead to the creation of order in the first Pan Gu story. The second Pan Gu story extensively describes the source of the name. **Evaluate the reasons** the story gives for his specific name; determine whether the reasons given seem sufficient to explain the name.

The dog, the hero of the second Pan Gu story, hears the challenge given to win the hand of the king's daughter. To achieve victory, the dog uses a series of tricks to win the prize. **Compare and contrast** the tricks used in this story with tricks used by Odysseus and the Cyclops. List the similar details that you can find between the two.

For tricks to succeed, someone else must **draw a wrong conclusion** in a particular scene. Identify those who draw wrong conclusions in this story; determine how closely their wrong conclusions match those in other stories.

Literary Skills

For the Chinese, numbers are important. For example, the number eight represents prosperity; for that reason, the Beijing Olympics began at eight am on August 8, 2008 – the eighth hour of the eighth day of the eighth month in the eighth year of this millennium. Other **important numbers** include three, representing life or birth, and nine (3 x 3) **symbolizing** eternity or power. From your reading of the first Pan Gu story, **draw your own conclusions** about the numbers used in the opening paragraph.



Beijing, China

As discussed with the “Birth of Hawaii,” **eggs** play a significant role in **folklore** and creation stories. In fact, our Western tradition of Easter Eggs comes at the time of the spring equinox, the time of re-birth (and the time of the start of the year in many cultures). In the first Pan Gu story, examine the details concerning the Pan Gu awaking inside the egg. **Describe** the actions he took. Although the description is rather brief, **compare and contrast** his actions with those of other heroes studied this year.

Although the first Pan Gu story describes only the man, the second relies heavily on the story about Pan Gu the Dog. **Describe** the events concerning the dog that reflect the significant role of animals in **folktales** and in **fables**. **Compare and contrast** the details of this animal story with others studied this year. Explain what sets this **animal fable** apart from the others we’ve read.

As another **characteristic of folktales**, *magic* plays a role in this story as well. Explain how magic functions overall in the story. In particular story, the magic is associated with a golden bell, one large enough to cover the sleeping dog. Bells have a long history in Chinese culture, first associated with homes, and later with Buddhist temples, calling monks to prayer. **List the images** that you associate with bells. **Draw your own conclusion** explaining the significant role of the bell in this story.

One version of the first story describes the ancestors of mankind. Explain the significance of this source for humans. Based on the **evidence**, **draw your own conclusion** concerning the place of humans in the order of the world. Describe the **irony** you see in this description. In the second story, identify the **irony** in the story with the actions of the princess: she has good intentions, worried that Pan Gu would die of starvation. Describe the results of her actions.

Vocabulary

The first Pan Gu story uses two **extended similes**: the parts of egg forming the sky and land; then the parts of Pan Gu's body forming the physical features of the land. Analyze the elements of these similes; determine how the parts correspond. Draw your own conclusions on the **effect** of similes in making the story more memorable.

Sleep plays a significant role in the second Pan Gu story. **Create your own simile** that relates the change that comes over Pan Gu with the change of another animal that occurs during an extended sleep. **Analyze** how dreams would fit within the story, assuming that Pan Gu dreams while asleep.

To begin his journey to get the head of Fang, the story says that he "slipped out of the palace." Identify the **various meanings** of the word *slip*; **using the context**, identify the **denotations** associated with the word as used here.

The story quotes the **idiom** "Since Pan gu created earth and the heavens." **Explain this idiom** in your own words.

Specific vocabulary words: cosmology, chaos, broadax, turbid, marrow, jade, temple, monk, enmity, slipped, banquet, solicitude

